

**Arizona Department of Education**  
**First Things First**  
**Arizona's School Readiness Framework**

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## **Acknowledgements**

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FINAL DRAFT

## **Why Arizona Needs a School Readiness Framework**

Similar to the varied and diverse terrain of Arizona, our children throughout the state represent a range of experiences, backgrounds, and abilities. There are a lot of misconceptions about what school readiness looks like (singing the alphabet song, counting to ten, writing their name). While these are important skills, they do not represent the comprehensive knowledge and skills that children must have in order to be fully prepared for the kindergarten curriculum and standards.

When the adults in a child's life provide high quality early learning experiences, children have stronger communication skills, creativity, initiative, and the confidence to approach new challenges. However, the adults may have varying levels of exposure to the Arizona Early Learning Standards which establish the general knowledge a child is expected to know prior to kindergarten entry. When adults have increased levels of awareness of the Arizona Early Learning Standards, they can facilitate activities to help children prepare for the rigor expected in kindergarten.

The early years are an exciting time in the development of children, and the transition into kindergarten is filled with both opportunity and challenge. Arizona recognizes that students today must attain the knowledge and skills needed to be college and career ready. As a result more focused attention must be shed on what happens in the birth to five years in order to create a strong foundation for all future learning. Collaborative efforts have led to the creation of a foundational continuum for Arizona's children, illustrated in a series of guiding documents that include the Arizona's Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines, the Arizona Early Learning Standards for children ages three to kindergarten entry and the Program Guidelines for High

Quality Early Education: Birth through Kindergarten. Building upon these critical documents, Arizona stakeholders, have come together to identify Arizona's School Readiness Framework (ASRF) that expresses a commitment to ensuring children are prepared as they enter the world of academic instruction and learning.

The Arizona School Readiness Framework (ASRF) encourages collaboration between services and the numerous parts of the early childhood system. The framework reflects the purpose of identifying readiness, and builds on the state's efforts to establish a system in which all children have access to quality experiences leading to school success. There are four specific goals of the ASRF:

1. To establish a common language around school readiness
2. To develop a clear outline of the readiness framework
3. Determine the roles of standards, effective instruction, and curriculum
4. Identify meaningful, well-aligned assessment of readiness to individualize instruction.

The framework combines four essential components to provide the supports needed to ensure children's school readiness and meet the goals identified above. The components are as follows: a common definition of school readiness, the use of effective instruction, standards, curriculum, and assessment, family engagement partnerships, and finally, quality transitions into kindergarten for all children.

Recognizing the significance of building a strong continuum in the early years is fundamental to the development of the ASRF. The framework outlined in this document provides the structure for the school readiness piece of the early childhood system that begins in infancy. The ASRF builds upon the growing body of research demonstrating the need for high

quality early learning experiences and identifies the context for implementing Arizona's School Readiness Framework.

### **Establishing a Common Language to Lead to a Definition of School Readiness**

Bridging the gap between various early childhood systems and services requires that those in the field have a common understanding of what children need to be well prepared for school. The ASRF offers the adults who impact the lives of children a common definition for understanding the term, *school readiness*. Using a broadly understood working definition regarding what constitutes a child's readiness for school allows stakeholders from different parts of the early childhood system, whether a pediatric nurse, home visitor, librarian, parent or a preschool teacher, to work collaboratively and ensure all children arrive at school ready to meet the challenges of a rigorous academic curriculum in kindergarten.

In addition to providing a general understanding and vocabulary for discussing school readiness, The Framework provides practitioners with an outline of necessary concepts supported by the continuum of guidelines and early learning standards. Those who work directly with young children can access professional development and effective tools for implementing the readiness framework and be a resource for families and communities.

### **What is School Readiness in Arizona?**

The question of what it means for a child to be "ready for school" remains a topic of much national attention. Several recent attempts to identify and define school readiness have been made. In particular, the reauthorization of Head Start as the School Readiness Act of 2007 provided a more concrete definition of school readiness as, "the expectations of children's status and progress across domains for language and literacy development, cognition and general

knowledge, approaches to learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development that will improve their readiness for kindergarten.”<sup>vi</sup> Secondly, the US Department of Education outlined the expectations of kindergarten readiness through the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Fund. In addition, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) identifies school readiness as involving more than just children. School readiness, in the broadest sense, is about children, families, early environments, schools, and communities. NAEYC recognizes that children are not innately “ready” or “not ready” for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school (NAEYC, 2004). The commonality amongst the varying definitions establishes the expectation for a comprehensive approach to kindergarten readiness and emphasizes the role of the adults in a child’s life as the key to developing readiness for school. This reflects a movement toward a more holistic view of school readiness that encompasses each of the domains of development. Building on the work of NAEYC and Head Start, Arizona defines school readiness as:

*Arizona’s young children will demonstrate school readiness through the Essential Domains of Language and Literacy development, Cognition and General Knowledge (including early mathematics and early scientific development), Approaches to Learning (curiosity, initiative, persistence, creativity, problem-solving and confidence), Physical Well-Being and Motor Development and Self-Regulation of attention and emotion. Intentional development of skills and knowledge in these domains establishes a critical foundation for children to engage in and benefit from opportunities to learn.*

In seeking a common definition for school readiness, Arizona has adopted a comprehensive approach to describing what readiness looks like for young children entering kindergarten. The definition of school readiness used in ASRF emphasizes both the knowledge and attributes children need in order to attend to challenging curriculum presented in the kindergarten classroom.

The general knowledge component expected of a student ready to enter kindergarten relates directly to the Arizona Early Learning Standards. Examples might include recognizing one's written name, counting using one to one correspondence, or identifying some letters of the alphabet from their name. The general knowledge goals specifically focus around language and literacy development, early mathematics and scientific thinking as outlined in the corresponding standards. (<http://www.azed.gov/early-childhood/files/2011/11/arizona-early-learning-standards-3rd-edition.pdf>).

The Arizona Early Learning Standards 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition highlights the Approaches to Learning as a standard. This standard relates to children's abilities to think and problem-solve and includes more abstract constructs such as memory and attention. Being able to attend and process information are critical to a child's learning and achievement.<sup>ii</sup> Identifying how a child approaches a new learning situation is an important piece of their school readiness.

Self-regulation, found in the Social and Emotional Early Learning Standard, holds particular importance for a child's capacity for school success. Several studies have shown a strong, predictive correlation between self-regulation and academic success.<sup>iii</sup> Specifically, self-regulation sets the stage for managing one's own behavior, focusing on tasks, and undertaking challenges presented.<sup>iv</sup>

Current research suggests that self-regulation provides a significant link between a child's emotional and cognitive competencies.<sup>v</sup> Self-regulation may be seen as the ability to monitor one's own thinking and behaviors.<sup>vi</sup> Self-regulation encompasses the skills and attributes children need to appropriately respond to their environment<sup>vii</sup> by controlling and adjusting: their emotions, their behavior in social interactions, and their attention during cognitive experiences.<sup>viii</sup> In regard to school readiness, self-regulation supports children in their ability to:

- Inhibit impulsivity and follow school rules and social norms;
- Cope with challenges and engage in difficult cognitive tasks;
- Develop intentionality and plan for and communicate their needs;
- Demonstrate awareness of their environment and others around them to effectively interact with people and spaces within various settings; and
- Maintain attention and motivation for learning activities to occur.<sup>ix</sup>

Self-regulation crosses multiple domains of development and therefore plays a critical role in a child's academic achievement.<sup>x</sup> For example, a child who develops emotional competence in the ability to cope with making mistakes will more likely be able to persist at challenging tasks involving critical thinking and problem solving. Through new research, it is becoming increasingly clear that the ability to self-regulate is essential for ongoing achievement as students respond to the challenges beyond K-12 education.

### **Effective Instruction**

Successful teachers of young children promote growth in all developmental domains identified in the ASRF. Effective instructional strategies for all young learners change as children grow and develop. Young learners preparing for kindergarten must have access to varying learning activities that the adults in their lives intentionally plan. Children must have the opportunity to use play as an effective instructional strategy. Adults must strategically build children's skills that demonstrate proficiency of the standards. Providing support and scaffolding for the developmental domains of learning is the instruction that leads to school competence for young learners. In practice, effective instruction includes a combination of environmental design, provision of engaging materials, and nurturing and responsive interactions between adults and children. To best prepare young children for academic instruction in a K-12



setting, teachers and other adults must provide children with multiple experiences that are child-centered, experiential, and focused on problem-solving rather than rote learning. Early learning experiences should include a balance between child-directed and adult-directed activities.

Affording children various opportunities to become confident in their independent problem solving increases their capacity to self-regulate and thus expands their preparedness for school entry.

### **Standards**

As a precursor, the first guiding document outlining child outcomes begins with the Arizona Infant and Toddler Developmental Guidelines for children birth to the age of three. As children get closer to formalized school experience there is a shift towards more intentional instruction that will lead to school readiness. The Arizona Early Learning Standards have been developed to provide a framework for the planning of quality learning experiences for all children three to five years of age. The standards cover a broad range of skill development and provide a useful instructional foundation for children from diverse backgrounds and varying abilities. The standards are intended for use by all those who work with young children in any early care and education setting in urban, rural and tribal communities. They are a tool to be used by parents as well as caregivers and teachers. The standards documents are based on the premise that learning occurs on a continuum and that developmental domains are highly interrelated. Children succeed to their highest potential in nurturing environments that support their learning across domains and through the standards continuum.

The Arizona Early Learning Standards are divided into eight standards. Each standard is divided into strands, concepts and indicators. See the following chart for your convenience, which headlines the standards, strands, and concepts. .

Standard	Strand	Concept
Social Emotional	1. Self	Self-awareness
		Recognizes and expresses feelings
		Self-regulation
	2. Relationships	Attachment
		Social interactions
		Respect
Approaches to Learning	1. Initiative and Curiosity	Initiative
		Curiosity
	2. Attentiveness and Persistence	Attentiveness
		Persistence
	3. Confidence	Confidence
	4. Creativity	Creativity
5. Reasoning and Problem-Solving	Reasoning	
	Problem-solving	
Language and Literacy	1. Language	Receptive Language Understanding
		Expressive Language and Communication Skills
		Vocabulary
	2. Emergent Literacy	Concepts of Print
		Book Handling Skills
		Phonological Awareness
		Alphabet Knowledge
	3. Emergent Writing	Comprehension
		Early Writing, Writing Processes, and Writing Application
Mathematics	1. Counting and Cardinality	Counts Out Loud
		Knows Number Names and Symbols
		Counts to Tell Number of Objects
		Compares Numbers and Quantities
	2. Operations and Algebraic Thinking	Explores Addition and Subtraction
		Patterning
	3. Measurement and Data	Sorts and Classifies
		Data Analysis
	4. Geometry	Measures
		Spatial Reasoning
Science	1. Inquiry and Application	Shapes
		Exploration, Observations, and Hypotheses
		Investigation
		Analysis and Conclusions
Social Studies	1. Family	Communication
	2. Community	Understands Family
		Understands Community
		Rights, Responsibilities, and Roles within Community
	Geography	
3. Historical Thinking	Understands Time – Past, Present and Future	
	Physical Development, Health and Safety	1. Physical and Motor Development
2. Health		Gross Motor Development
		Fine Motor Development
Fine Arts	3. Safety	Personal Health and Hygiene Practices
	1. Visual Arts	Safety and Injury Prevention
	2. Music and Creative Movement	Creates and Understands Visual Arts
3. Drama	Creates and Understands Music, Movement and Dance	
	Creates Dramatic Activities	

## **Curriculum**

The Arizona Early Learning Standards provide an essential first step for identifying an effective, high quality preschool curriculum. The curriculum should be researched based, align with the Arizona Early Learning Standards, and support the goals of the local program. The National Association for the Education of Young Children defines curriculum as consisting of the knowledge, skills, abilities and understandings children are to acquire and the plans for the learning experiences through which those gains will occur.

Any chosen curriculum should be developmentally appropriate for all young learners. A quality curriculum should promote the use of effective instruction. It should address hands on activities, play, small and large group times, planning for robust learning centers, and outdoor learning time. The curriculum should also include a list of learning materials that the adult may use to intentionally scaffold the learning of children. The curriculum should be based on the interest and varying abilities of the children in the classroom. The curriculum should prompt the teacher to connect the learning to children's experiences and provide multiple opportunities for practice and demonstration of skills and knowledge.

## **Assessment**

Assessments are used to document and understand children's growth and learning to inform every day experiences.. Effective assessment is conducted in an ongoing manner and used to guide instruction to best meet children's individual needs. As the assessment data is gathered in authentic and meaningful ways, information is used to intentionally plan instruction and build stronger relationships to support children's knowledge acquisition and self-regulation skills. Assessment generates information for and from parents, teachers, caregivers, and health professionals who all have a stake in preparing children for school entry. Through effective

assessment practices adults receive vital information about what children know and can do as well as what they are ready to learn. Having a clear picture of children's needs upon kindergarten entry allows teachers to appropriately plan curriculum throughout the year so that children can meet the rigor of the K-12 setting.

### **Family Engagement Partnerships**

Families play a critical role in supporting children's school readiness. They are the child's first teacher and expert on their child. Establishing a reciprocal relationship with families is critical to the development of healthy, successful learners. Open communication between early childhood professionals and families allows for the development of strong relationships and collaboration.

In a high quality early education program, frequent two-way communication is established and maintained, and families are presented with multiple opportunities to participate in activities and decisions that concern their children. Developing mutual respect, cooperation, and a shared responsibility for the child helps the family to see that they are a valued partner within the learning community. . Effective family engagement requires an ongoing interaction that provides opportunities for information sharing, goal setting, and identification of needed supports and services. Offering families multiple opportunities to be involved with their child's education early on sets the stage for long-term, effective and collaborative family-school relationships throughout children's academic experiences.<sup>xi</sup>

### **Quality Transition Into Kindergarten for all Children**

Too often discontinuities exist between the birth to five years and kindergarten experiences.<sup>xii</sup> As such, creating smooth transitions that better prepare children and their families for shifts in expectations and curriculum must be considered as part of a strong school readiness

framework. Effective kindergarten transitions are those that ensure collaborative, planned efforts among schools, teachers, families, and communities. Effective transitions utilize ongoing communication to form strong relationships over the full course of the year prior to kindergarten entry rather than considering transition as a single event activity. Additionally, transitions that best prepare children for entering school occur especially when there is a shared vision of readiness and the transition process.<sup>xiii</sup>

How Arizona Approaches School Readiness Arizona stakeholders must be strategic and intentional in ensuring improved school readiness for its youngest learners. Children's earliest experiences, especially those during a child's first three years, shape the brain and create the structures necessary for learning.<sup>xiv</sup> Therefore, recognizing the significance of a strong birth to five system is fundamental to the development of the Arizona School Readiness Framework. The School Readiness Framework provides common goals for the varying parts of the Arizona early childhood system and supports and builds upon the growing body of research demonstrating the relationship between high quality early education and later academic achievement. The successful implementation of Arizona's Readiness Framework is dependent upon building partnerships with families, improving kindergarten transitions, and building knowledge appropriately matched to the varying stakeholders.

## Conclusion

The early years are an exciting time in the development of children, and the transition into kindergarten is filled with both opportunity and challenge. Arizona recognizes that students today must attain the knowledge and skills needed to be college and career ready.

Evidence of the importance of quality early care and education during a child's first five years is clear. Making a commitment to ensure all of Arizona's children enter school ready to learn requires acknowledging that school readiness begins in infancy. As infant-toddler developmental specialist, Ron Lally points out, "...the first building blocks of learning are laid down during the first two years of life through early social and emotional exchanges, and future learning is built on this foundation."<sup>xv</sup> When the adults in a child's life provide high quality early learning experiences, children have stronger communication skills, creativity, initiative, and the confidence to approach new challenges.

The Arizona School Readiness Framework encourages collaboration between families, services, and the numerous parts of the early childhood system. As outlined, the framework reflects the purpose of identifying readiness, and builds on the state's efforts to establish a system in which all children have access to quality experiences leading to school success. Building a coordinated, statewide effort to establish common understandings of school readiness will ensure Arizona's children receive a solid foundation to successfully engage in the rigorous academic demands of K-12 education. Arizona's School Readiness Framework both prepares children for academic success in kindergarten and also puts them on a path to lifelong success.

## **Designing the Kindergarten Developmental Inventory**

Lastly, the Arizona School Readiness Framework provides the groundwork needed to design and develop Arizona's Kindergarten Developmental Inventory (KDI). The purpose of the KDI is to provide a tool that allows parents, teachers and administrators to understand the extent of a child's learning and development at the beginning of kindergarten to develop instruction that will lead to the child's academic success. The tool that is developed or adopted will align with the *Arizona Early Learning Standards* and *Arizona's Common Core Standards* for kindergarten, cover all essential domains of school readiness (physical and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development and cognitive development), and will be reliable and valid for its intended use. Knowing the attributes and expectations for children's entry to school through the use of the Kindergarten Readiness Framework allows for the creation of an assessment mechanism that provides a valid measure of children's readiness at school entry. To date, predicting children's academic success through measurement of readiness indicators has been difficult.<sup>xvi</sup> But aligning readiness concepts with the assessment to reliably measure those concepts is a first step in designing a more effective achievement predictor.

## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> Kyle L. Snow, "Integrative Views of the Domains of Child Function: Unifying School Readiness," School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability, eds. R.D. Pianta, M.J. Cox., & K.L. Snow (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes, 2007) 197-211.
- <sup>ii</sup> Timothy Konold and Robert Pianta, "Empirically-Derived, Person-Oriented Patterns of School Readiness in Typically-Developing Children: Description and Prediction to First-Grade Achievement," *Applied Developmental Science*, V9 N4, 2005: 174-187.
- <sup>iii</sup> Judi Boyd, W. Steven Barnett, Elena Bodrova, Deborah J. Leong, and Deanna Gomby, Promoting Children's Social and Emotional Development Through Preschool Education, (National Institute for Early Education Research, New Brunswick NJ: 2005).
- <sup>iv</sup> Boyd et. al.
- <sup>v</sup> Blair
- <sup>vi</sup> Clancy Blair, "Self-Regulation and School Readiness," ERIC Digest, 2003.
- <sup>vii</sup> Ida Rose Florez, "Developing Young Children's Self-Regulation through Everyday Experiences," *Young Children*, July 2011: 46-51
- <sup>viii</sup> Blair
- <sup>ix</sup> Florez
- <sup>x</sup> Florez
- <sup>xi</sup> Robert C. Pianta & Marcia Kraft-Sayre, Successful Kindergarten Transition: Your Guide to Connecting Children, Families, & Schools, (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes, 2003) p. 41.



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<sup>xii</sup> Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, p.2

<sup>xiii</sup> Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, p.87

<sup>xiv</sup> J. Ronald Lally, "School Readiness Begins in Infancy," *Kappan* v92 N3, 2010: 17-21.

<sup>xv</sup> Lally, p.18

<sup>xvi</sup> Maryland Committee for Children

NAEYC (Maxwell & Clifford 2004, 42):